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ANALYSIS OF JUNIOR OFFICER COMMENTS ON EARLY ARMY EXPERIENCE, (U)
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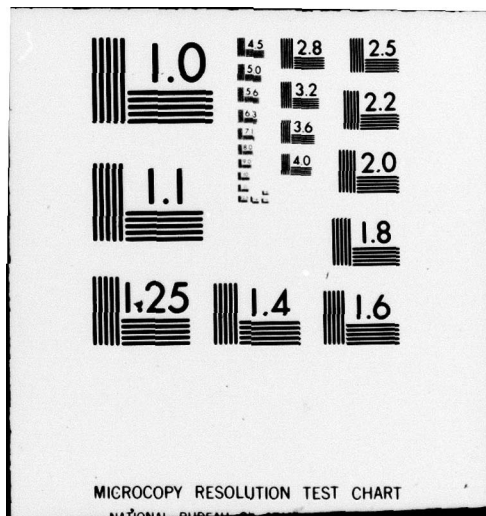
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6 ANALYSIS OF JUNIOR OFFICER COMMENTS ON EARLY ARMY EXPERIENCE

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JOB

ANALYSIS OF JUNIOR OFFICER COMMENTS ON EARLY ARMY EXPERIENCE

BRIEF

Requirement:

✓ As part of research to develop improved techniques for assigning officers according to the psychological requirements of different kinds of officer jobs, an attitude questionnaire is administered to junior officers comprising the experimental sample. At the request of DCSPER, a preliminary analysis was made of statements made in the "Comments" section of the questionnaire.

Procedure:

✱ Statements made by 150 officers were categorized and examined in relation both to intention to remain in the Army and to area of job assignment--combat, technical, or administrative.

Findings:

1. ✓ Of the total sample, 50 percent indicated intention to leave the service. The percentage was much higher for technical officers (74%) than for combat (30%) or administrative (46%) officers.
2. ✱ Concern over inadequate use of abilities and training was expressed by 48 percent, over half of whom intended to leave the service. 23% expressed a desire that individual preferences be considered in making officer assignments.
3. ✱ About 23 percent indicated that junior officer pay was felt to be low in comparison with civilian pay.
4. ✱ Some officers made more than one reference to these reasons for concern, indicating that these matters were of considerable importance to the individual.

Utilization of Findings:

Results--which have been furnished to DCSPER--contributed to the increased knowledge of Army officers and their jobs accruing from research performed under the Officer Prediction Task.

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ANALYSIS OF JUNIOR OFFICER COMMENTS ON EARLY ARMY EXPERIENCE

The overall mission of the Officer Prediction Task of the U. S. Army Personnel Research Office is to determine whether predictors can be developed which would optimally assign newly commissioned officers to broadly defined occupational areas. The general design of the research involves administration of a large number of experimental predictors to incoming officers and the validation of these predictors against performance on situational tests administered approximately 18 months later.

Prior to taking the situational performance test battery, each officer in the validation sample completes an attitude questionnaire (Officer Assignment Questionnaire, PT 4505). In this instrument, the officer is asked to state his intention with regard to remaining in the Army and specific questions are asked about his branch and duty assignment. Several of the questions request the officer to state in his own words reasons for whatever response he has given.

The present publication reports on a study in which these open-ended responses were analyzed for a small sample of the officers. The purpose of the study was to identify problem areas and categories of concern within problem areas which generated a relatively high number of negative responses from the officers. The figures are reported by two breakdowns: first, by the job assignment held by the officer--combat, technical, administrative; and second, by stated career intention--to remain in the service, to leave the service, or undecided.

PROCEDURE

SELECTION OF THE SAMPLE

Approximately 4000 newly commissioned officers took the predictor battery at the beginning of their tour of active duty. From these 4000, 900 officers are selected for temporary assignment at the Officer Evaluation Center where the situational performance tests are administered. Selection is on the basis of current assignment within CONUS, availability for temporary duty assignment to the testing center, and specific job assignment. The job assignment of each officer and the specific tasks he performs are described in written accounts submitted by five persons--the officer's immediate superior, a superior other than immediate, two peers, and the officer himself. Two research psychologists independently analyze the five descriptions and define the job assignment as falling within the combat, technical, or administrative job areas. If differences cannot be resolved to the satisfaction of both psychologists, the officer involved is excluded from the sample. For each broad job area, 300 officers are selected to form the criterion group.

The sample in the present small-scale study consisted of 150 men whose job assignments prior to reporting for criterion testing were clearly within one of the three areas, by absolute agreement of the two psychologists. The sample was taken from among the first 400 men tested. Men were selected by proceeding from the earliest groups coming to the center for criterion testing until 50 officers had been selected for each job area. The sample was further defined by Army component--Regular Army (RA) or U. S. Army Reserve (USAR). However, no RA officers were obtained in the sample for the technical job area.

THE QUESTIONNAIRE

The Officer Assignment Questionnaire is divided into five sections. Section I, Background, includes personal information items such as education, marital status, and source of commission. Section II, Branch Assignment, concerns satisfaction with primary branch assignment. Section III, Duty Assignment, deals with attitudes toward present duty assignment. Section IV, Career Intention, taps attitudes toward the Army as a career and toward the Army in general. Section V, Comments, invites the officer to comment on any matter which may have affected his attitudes as formally evaluated in the previous sections, as well as on any matter not covered in the questionnaire.

There are 18 questions scattered through Sections II, III, and IV which provide opportunity for write-in responses explaining responses made. The open-ended responses to these questions, together with responses offered in the Comments section, formed the subject matter of the present study.

ANALYSIS

Results for the total sample and for each 50-man sample were analyzed by Army component (where sufficient numbers were available) and by intention with regard to an Army career--those who intended to remain in the Army after their obligated tour, those who intended to leave the Army as soon as possible, and those who were undecided at the time they filled out the questionnaire. Intention was determined by two research psychologists who independently reviewed the completed questionnaires. No disagreement with regard to any officer's career intention resulted from this procedure.

The open-ended responses were coded according to five general problem areas and the 24 categories listed in Table 1. Categories were developed on a small number of questionnaires, then modified as the need for additional categories was indicated. Since emphasis in the analysis was on finding reasons for negative attitudes toward the Army, the categories reflect what are essentially unfavorable comments.

Table 1

PROBLEM AREAS AND RESPONSE CATEGORIES USED IN ANALYSIS
OF OFFICERS' COMMENTS

I. Family Considerations

1. Too frequent changes of station
2. Poor living standards--inadequate or no quarters
3. Family separations
4. Social obligations
5. Wife doesn't like Army

II. Personal Freedom too Limited

6. Too many hardships
7. Hours too long
8. Desired locations
9. Too much supervision

III. Pride in Profession

10. Low quality of leadership
11. Low quality of peers
12. Status of Army as a profession
13. Knowledge that job is worthwhile
14. Excess of paper work

IV. Security and Income

15. Career future limited
16. Cultural and educational opportunities
17. Fringe benefits dissatisfaction
18. Can make more money in civilian life
19. Promotion based too much on seniority
20. Money differential between enlisted NCO, OCS, ROTC, etc.

V. Army Hasn't Provided Opportunity to Do Suitable Type of Work

21. Inadequate utilization of abilities
 22. Placement in desired functions
 23. Branch assignment discrepancy
 24. Uncertainty regarding future assignments
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Responses were tabulated to determine the number of officers making responses in each category, and analyzed by career intention and job assignment area. In addition, the total number of times each response was given throughout the questionnaire was tabulated and a crude index of intensity of feeling, termed Response-Responder Ratio, was computed by dividing the number of times each response was given by the number of individuals making that response one or more times.

RESULTS

CAREER INTENTION

Of the 150-man sample, 50 percent expressed an intention of leaving the service, 24 percent said they intended to make the Army their career, and 26 percent were undecided (Table 2). The combat group had a higher percentage of career-minded officers (44%) than did either the administrative group (22%) or the technical group (6%). The preponderance of RA officers in the combat group could at least partially account for the percentage of combat officers intending to remain in the Army, since RA officers may be expected to have greater commitment to an Army career than officers in the USAR.

The percentage of career-minded officers in the technical group was notably low (6%). Remember that there were no RA officers in this group.

REASON GIVEN FOR UNFAVORABLE ATTITUDES

Improper use of abilities and training was the response category occurring most frequently when questionnaires of the total sample were considered. Of all the officers, 48 percent offered comments in this category (No. 21, Table 1). A majority of those offering comments in this category indicated their intention of leaving the Army (Table 3). Failure to be placed in desired jobs and job functions (No. 22) and financial considerations (No. 18) each were mentioned by 23 percent of the sample. Doubt was expressed concerning the "worthwhileness" of the job (No. 13) by 17 percent of the officers. A like percentage commented on the limitations of a future career in the Army (No. 15). Uncertainty regarding future assignments (No. 24) was cited as a negative factor in an Army career by 16 percent. However, some conditions which might logically be associated with this uncertainty received relatively infrequent mention. For example, frequent change of station (No. 1) was mentioned by 10 percent, family separations (No. 3) by 8 percent, and undesirable location of duty (No. 8) by 2 percent.

Judging from these figures, attitude toward utilization of abilities and consideration of personal job preference were more important than family and travel problems for these officers.

Table 2

STATED CAREER INTENTION OF COMBAT, TECHNICAL,
AND ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICERS IN
THE SAMPLE, BY COMPONENT

Stated Career Intention	RA N	USAR N	Total N	%
<u>Combat Sample</u>				
Remain in the Service	20	2	22	44
Leave the Service	4	11	15	30
Undecided	9	4	13	26
<u>Administrative Sample</u>				
Remain in the Service	5	6	11	22
Leave the Service	1	22	23	46
Undecided	4	12	16	32
<u>Technical Sample</u>				
Remain in the Service		3	3	6
Leave the Service		37	37	74
Undecided		10	10	20
<u>Totals</u>				
Remain in the Service	25	11	36	24
Leave the Service	5	70	75	50
Undecided	13	26	39	26

INTENSITY OF FEELING

The last column of Table 3 presents the Response-Responder Ratio for all 24 categories of response. Again, complaints regarding the utilization of abilities and training yielded by far the most intense response, with an index of 1.89, or an average of almost 2 comments per man. Placement in desired functions had a ratio of 1.46. Of the remaining categories, pay commensurate with that of comparable civilian jobs and uncertainty regarding future assignment were mentioned by enough officers and with sufficient frequency to stand out as evoking considerable feeling. Comments on the financial aspects of Army service reflect an understandable attitude, considering the pay received by a junior officer.

Table 3

NUMBER OF OFFICERS MAKING COMMENTS IN EACH RESPONSE CATEGORY, BY STATED CAREER INTENTION
AND JOB ASSIGNMENT AREA

Response Categories	Combat		Administrative		Technical		Totals		Total Officers Responding	Total No. of Responses	Response-Responder Ratio
	In	Out	In	Out	In	Out	In	Out			
1 - Change of Station	1	3	-	3	-	6	-	12	15	15	1.00
2 - Living Conditions	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	0	1	1	1.00
3 - Family Separations	1	-	-	3	-	5	1	8	12	15	1.33
4 - Social Obligations	-	1	-	1	-	5	1	7	9	10	1.10
5 - Wife-Army	-	2	-	1	1	2	2	5	11	14	1.27
6 - Hardships	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	0	1	1	1.00
7 - Long Hours	1	-	1	-	-	2	2	2	5	6	1.20
8 - Location	-	1	-	1	-	1	1	3	4	4	1.00
9 - Supervision	1	-	1	2	1	5	1	7	12	15	1.25
10 - Leadership	2	3	1	5	2	4	-	12	17	22	1.29
11 - Peers	2	1	-	3	1	-	-	4	8	9	1.12
12 - Prof Status	1	2	1	2	1	6	2	10	16	18	1.18
13 - Value of Job	3	3	2	6	1	6	-	15	26	27	1.04
14 - Paper Work	3	-	1	1	1	1	1	2	8	8	1.00
15 - Career Limitations	-	1	1	9	1	11	3	21	26	28	1.07
16 - Cultural & Educ.	-	2	-	1	-	5	-	8	11	14	1.27
17 - Fringe Benefits	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	0	3	3	1.00
18 - Pay	3	3	-	6	2	17	2	26	34	45	1.26
19 - Seniority	-	3	-	3	-	7	1	13	14	18	1.28
20 - Pay Differential	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	0	1	1	1.00
21 - Use of Abilities	3	9	4	14	4	25	6	48	72	136	1.89
22 - Desired Placement	2	6	4	6	4	11	-	23	35	52	1.49
23 - Br. Assignment	1	1	-	1	-	-	-	1	7	10	1.43
24 - Uncertainty	3	-	2	3	3	7	3	10	24	28	1.16
TOTAL	29	41	18	70	27	3	126	237	372		
								85			

Uncertainty regarding future assignments was stated for the most part without reference to satisfaction--or lack thereof--with the present assignment. Rather, statements were in this vein: "There is no way of my knowing whether my future assignments will be satisfactory to me or not, or whether I will be fully utilized or not." When an officer made a statement of this kind in conjunction with expressed intention to leave the service, he obviously considered it important to control the direction of his future job functions and would expect to be able to do so outside the Army.

CONCLUSIONS

In general, this analysis of open-ended or free responses on the Officer Assignment Questionnaire placed the main reason for decision to leave the service on the job satisfaction area. The dissatisfactions most often expressed were (1) frustration of operating in a job which does not utilize one's abilities and training; (2) assignment to a job without one's preference being sought or considered; (3) belief that one can make more money in civilian life; or that, for reasons of seniority or Army pay differentials, pay is not commensurate with ability; and (4) helplessness with regard to future job assignments.

Not only were these reasons given by a fair number of the officers but they tended to be restated by the same men, indicating their importance to the individual.

While these complaints were made with greatest frequency by technical personnel, they also dominated responses made by combat and administrative officers. The fact that the technical sample had no RA personnel indicates that under current procedures there is less possibility of continuity of personnel in jobs in the technical area than in other areas. If such continuity is desirable--as it seems to be--the importance of increased job satisfaction in the technical area takes on greater importance than in the other two areas. A more complete classification program, responsive to the training, abilities, and interests of all incoming officers, both RA and USAR--a major goal of officer prediction research--could lead to greater job satisfaction among all officers.